

ARTICLE APPEARED
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WASHINGTON POST
27 June 1985

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Getting Into Nicaragua, Tent Peg by Tent Peg

When Congress voted for "humane" aid for Nicaragua I thought the White House would finally be satisfied.

"Well, you got your money. Does that mean we don't have to go to war there anymore?" I questioned an aide.

"What makes you ask that?" Hawk said.

"The administration said if Congress did not vote aid to the contras we would wind up sending in troops. Since they did vote the money the president asked for, is it safe to assume we can stop worrying about an American invasion?"

"I wouldn't assume anything when it comes to our policy in Nicaragua. This was a good first step for the Congress, but the people on the Hill are going to have to follow up with something a lot more substantial if they want to show their 'good faith.'"

"For goodness' sake, man, Congress gave you \$28 million. That's everything the president asked for."

"You can't even mine a harbor for \$28 million. The sole reason we're accepting the money is that it is a step in the right direction. Although we can only spend it for blankets, trucks and ambulances, it's a commitment. Once the United States makes a commitment it's awfully hard for it to get out of the commitment, without making another commitment, and so on, ad infinitum."

"Darn it, Hawk, the administration said nothing about another commitment after we made this one. You wouldn't have even received \$28 million if President Ortega hadn't gone to Moscow."

"You're making too much of the money," Hawk said. "What the administration got out of this was not a small aid package, but a symbolic gesture from the Congress that the president is free to do what he wants in Central America."

"I'm not sure that was Congress' intention. Didn't the president agree to find a diplomatic solution to the problem?"

"Yes, he did," Hawk said. "And we have \$2 million set aside to try to find peace."

"Two for peace and \$26 million for war?"

"That's about right. Remember, though, the \$26 million is going for humane aid. We're not permitted under the act to give them any weapons."

"I'm glad you brought that up. If we're only supplying nonmilitary aid to the contras, who is supplying them with arms, guns and rockets?"

"Private medical foundations," Hawk said.

"It sounds like the CIA to me."

"The CIA cannot give the contras arms. It would violate the law."

"So?"

"Can we talk about something else?"

"Sure. What is our foreign policy in Central America, besides giving humanitarian aid to the contras?"

"Our policy is to make Ortega think twice the next time he wants to take a trip to Russia."

"I'm for that, but I still have a sneaky feeling that despite all the talk by the administration, the real policy is to hit the beaches in Nicaragua."

"If we did go in, and I'm not saying we ever will, it would be like rolling off a log."

"Then despite the fact Congress passed the aid bill, you haven't ruled out the option."

"No president would ever rule out the option of going to war in Nicaragua."

"Promise me one thing. You won't let the Marines invade Nicaragua until you use up the \$28 million."

"That was spent long ago to buy insect repellent," Hawk said. "We're now preparing a supplementary bill of \$100 million for tent pegs for our freedom fighters."

"How can you be so certain you'll get it?"

"We will if we persuade Ortega to take another trip to the Soviet Union. If he doesn't want to fly commercial, we'll give him Air Force One."

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